

IN THE SPECIFICATION

Please replace paragraph [0018] with the following amended paragraph:

[0018] Although the steering mechanism 14 shown in Figure 1 comprises a conventional steering column with a shaft 22, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the steering mechanism 14 used in the assembly 10 need not be limited to one utilizing a traditional column structure. The steering mechanism 14 may, for example, comprise a steer-by-wire system which may or may not include a mechanical steering linkage such as the shaft [12] 22.

Please replace paragraphs [0020] – [0022] with the following amended paragraphs:

[0020] Although each of the guide rods 18 may have any suitable shape, each guide rod 18 shown in Figure 1 is preferably straight and comprises a steering tube having a front end 36 and a rear end 38. Although any number of guide rods, or steering tubes, 18 may be utilized and arranged in any suitable configuration relative to the guide bracket 12, the guide rods [steering tubes] 18 of the present invention preferably include four tubes spaced from one another in a quadrangle.

[0021] A front bracket 40 interconnects the front ends 36 of the guide rods [steering tubes] 18, and a rear bracket 42 supports the rear ends 38 of the guide rods [steering tubes] 18 and the steering mechanism 14. The front and rear brackets 40 and 42 are spaced on opposite sides of the guide bracket 12, such that the guide bracket 12 is located along the guide rods [steering tubes] 18 between the front and rear brackets 40 and 42.

[0022] A second plurality of steering shear elements 34 interconnect the rear bracket 42 and the guide rods [steering tubes] 18. The steering shear elements 34 normally prevent movement of the guide rods [steering tubes] 18 relative to the rear bracket 42, but shear in response to

application of the predetermined collapse force to the steering mechanism **14** for allowing the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** to move through the rear bracket **42** in the same manner as the shear elements associated with the guide bracket **12**. The rear ends **38** of the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** preferably extend through the rear bracket ~~40~~42.

Please replace paragraph [0026] with the following amended paragraph:

[0026] The guide bracket **12** includes an upper block **62** having bores **64** therethrough. The guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** extend through the bores **64**. The guide bracket **12** also includes a lower block **66** having bores **68** therethrough. The bolster tubes **54** extend through the bores **68** in the lower block **66**.

Please replace paragraphs [0027] - [0030] with the following amended paragraphs:

[0027] While any appropriate shearable device may be used, the steering shear elements **34** and bolster shear elements **56** of the present invention preferably comprise bushings. Each bushing is interposed between one of the rods [~~tubes~~] **18** or **54** and one of either the guide bracket **12** or the rear bracket **42** and has a detent or other feature which maintains the rod [~~tube~~] **18** or **54** in a fixed position relative to the guide bracket **12** or the rear bracket **42** during normal operation. Upon application of a sufficient collapse force to the steering mechanism **22** or knee bolster **52**, the detents or other features on the bushings maintaining the linkage between the guide bracket **12** or the rear bracket **42** and the respective rods [~~tubes~~] **18** or **54** will be broken, or “shear”, which not only overcomes the holding force on, but also releases the tubes **18** or ~~52~~ 54 for movement relative to the guide bracket **12** or rear bracket **42**.

[0028] The bolster tubes 54 of the assembly 10 are disposed in at least one pair on either side of the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] 18. The bolster tubes 54 are also disposed parallel to the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] 18. Two pairs of bolster tubes 54 are disclosed, and each pair extends through the bores 68 in the lower block 66. The rear ends 60 of the bolster tubes 54 are supported by the rear bracket 42. Disposing the bolster tubes 54 outside the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] 18 permits the knee bolster 52 to collapse without interfering with or otherwise initiating a simultaneous or subsequent collapse of the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] 18 and steering mechanism 14.

[0029] As is best shown in Figures 4 and 5, the assembly 10 also includes an energy absorber system 70 for absorbing energy during movement of the steering mechanism 14 and knee bolster 52 relative to the guide bracket 12. The energy absorber system 70 includes a first anvil-strap device 72 interconnecting the steering tubes 18 and upper block 62. The first anvil-strap device 72 includes a release bracket 74 with bores 76 therethrough. As is shown in Figure 2 [+], the release bracket 74 is disposed in engagement with the upper block 62. The guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] 18 extend through the bores 76 and are carried by the release bracket 74 in fixed relation to one another. The at least one and preferably two pair of plastically-deformable straps 78 with holes 80 therethrough are disposed in frictional and bending engagement with respective pairs of first and second anvils 82 and 84. The straps 78 interconnect the release bracket 74 with the upper block 62. Each pair of straps 78 includes a high-force strap 86 and a low-force strap 88 extending in parallel relation to one another from the release bracket 74. Retaining pins 90 are disposed within the release bracket 74. Each pin 90 extends through one of the holes 80 and interconnects the associated strap 86 or 88 with the release bracket 74. The pins 90 may

alternatively be disposed within the upper block 62 for securing the straps 86 and 88 with the upper block 62.

[0030] The first anvil-strap device 72 is a variable energy absorbing system that utilizes pairs of S-straps, i.e., straps deformed in the shape of the letter "S", having variable widths. However, one skilled in the art will appreciate that other energy absorbing devices may be used, including but not limited to those which employ one or more M-straps, J-straps, ,i.e., deformed in the shape of the letters "M" or "J", other straps, wires, pyrotechnic or other actuating devices, or a combination thereof.

Please replace paragraph [0032] with the following amended paragraph:

[0032] Although any suitable actuating device may be utilized, the preferred actuating device 100 comprises an electrically activated pyrotechnic device. A control system such as that which is schematically depicted at 104 in Figure 4 is operatively connected to the devices 100. The control system 104 monitors and detects variable components affected by the crash condition, determines the amount of energy to be absorbed, and transmits a signal corresponding to that amount to the actuating devices 100, which in turn actuates one or more of the devices 100 to modify the energy absorbing characteristics in accordance with the requirements of a particular crash event. For example, during a crash condition in which a large predetermined collapse force is applied to the assembly 10, none of the actuating devices 100 would be discharged in order to maximize the energy absorbing forces between the pairs of straps 86 and 88 and respective anvils 82 and 84. Under less severe, moderate conditions, the actuating devices 100 may initiate release of the low-force straps 88 to provide corresponding reduced energy absorbing characteristics of the system 104. Under still lesser crash conditions, the actuating

devices **100** may respond to by initiating release of the high-force straps **86** to produce a correspondingly reduced energy absorbing characteristic of the system **104**.

Please replace paragraph [0035] with the following amended paragraph:

[0035] The assembly **10** also includes a pedal assembly, which is generally shown at **106** in Figure 7. The pedal assembly **106** is pivotally connected to the rear bracket **42** for pivotal movement in response to movement of the guide rods ~~[steering tubes]~~ **18** relative to the rear bracket **42**. The pedal assembly **106** includes a brake assembly **108** and a throttle assembly **110**. A mounting assembly **112** interconnects the brake and throttle assemblies **108** and **110** with the rear bracket **42**.

Please replace paragraph [0039] with the following amended paragraph:

[0039] Referring ~~[again]~~ to Figure [5] 8, the bifurcated bracket **132** includes a pair of screw bosses **162** through which screws extend (not shown) for securing the bracket **132** to the mounting assembly **112**. The pedal assembly **106** also includes a release mechanism **164**, which has a pair of pyrotechnic bosses **166** defining chambers **168**. A pyrotechnic pin **170** is disposed within the rear bracket **42** and communicates with at least one of the chambers **168**. As is shown in Figure 7, pyrotechnic devices **172** are disposed on the bosses **168**. Actuating the devices **172** causes the pyrotechnic pin **170** to fire, which in turn causes the bifurcated bracket **132** to pivot away from the rear bracket **42**.